



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



SUCCESS STORIES

Vienna: Seminar for Police and Social Work

In Vienna, a first training project was organised and carried out in three consecutive years by the **Vienna Police Department** (LPD Wien) in cooperation with **Caritas Vienna in 2013, 2014 and 2015**. This specific training on principles and practice of social work was dedicated to 15 police officers in leading positions. The training was organised in two parts (3+2 days).

Part 1 included presentations on “the logics and principles of social work”, “social work in public space” (day 1); “prostitution”, “youth-work”, “asylum and migration” and “streetwork and football” (day 2); “reintegration after prison”, “communication” (day 3).

Part 2 was dedicated to field visits to a children and youth centre, a hospice for the elderly, a hostel for the homeless, an asylum centre, and the Caritas headquarter. Methods included classical presentations, discussion, group-work and excursions to facilities of social care and presentations there.

This kind of seminar has already been given to police officers in years before, but this was the first time when police officers from each district in Vienna should volunteer to learn more about the cooperation with professionals in social work in order to strengthen this idea on a more general level (independent from specific cases) in their local police units. Theoretical inputs should cover the following issues:

- History of social work
- Goals of social work
- Objectives of social work and occupational profile of social work
- Techniques and methods of social work
- Legal regulations in social work
- Overview of action fields of social work
- Cooperation with police
- Inputs from a variety of fields of social work: migration, youth work, elderly people, homelessness, drugs and addiction, work with disabled people, psychiatry and probationary services.

In an internal advertisement to police officers the goals of the seminar were explained:

“The goal of this seminar is to get to know the fields of action in social work and to understand particular options for intervention in social work. In our daily work we are often confronted with social workers. Sometimes we experience misunderstandings which can be explained by a lack of

information and knowledge. However, social work and police work with the same clientele, try to solve problems and offer help, although with different goals, approaches and means. In this seminar we want to take some time to learn about interfaces and differences, develop solutions and discuss necessary networking. ... Please wear civil clothing."

Apparently, the principle of voluntariness was not followed in all cases of participants. In practice, the seminar was characterised by discussions about experiences and single cases of course participants taken from daily practice. Sometimes the discussion was aggressive and "in heat" (accusations against social workers in general).

In a final workshop (in the theory section on day 3) "**communication**" was discussed together with social workers:

- Facilitate situations of personal encounter between police and social workers (in particular off-duty and apart from emergency cases)
- Reflect on the form of communication between police and social workers
- Reflect on the form of communication between police and clients of social workers
- Create mutual understanding
- Enhance images of the self and "the other" with participants of the training.

Usual forms of communication within the police and among social workers were presented and discussed: Formalities, directives and instructions, terminologies, neutral position in communication with clients, typical procedures in a "case".

Secondly, participants were asked to suggest examples from their daily practice. The following cases were discussed:

1. A police officer was called to an incident (robbery) at an out-patient facility of drug prevention. A social worker was there as a witness, but did not want to make a statement about the case. He insisted on his "duty of confidentiality".
2. A police officer found a person – apparently intoxicated in the street. A social worker attended who said he knew the person, but did not want to give any information.
3. A social worker reported a case, when she called the police to inform them about a missing person, and asked the police to check the person's house. The police officer on duty asked on the phone whether it "already stinks". This she experienced as disrespectful, provocative, and not helpful.
4. A case of psychiatry: A person, obviously psychotic, who apparently played with fire in a church, was not taken into custody. This led to a political discussion of the recent legal reform in psychiatry.

Misunderstandings and the lack of communication were discussed in the workshop.

Conclusions: In general this activity has been regarded as being very useful. It does help in correcting views and attitudes about social work and about particular institutions. It further helps establish or strengthen working relations with social work institutions and with social workers individually. At the end of the training sessions evaluation forms were disseminated and recollected confirming the conclusions mentioned above. However, no scientific evaluation was conducted about this activity.